The Watermark

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Editor's Note

Soft-spoken parental praise encourages initially. Peers with beady eyes and cracking grins encourage vindictively. Constructive critiques leave an artist like a dog with drooping ears, but nothing rivals personal expectation. The extraordinary pressure renders Calliope captive. Yet brown terrain sprouts fruitful endeavors, endless edits, and countless measures.

Art, an acquired agility, converts abstractions into tangible sensations. Fleeting epiphanies and forgotten realities, the great corral these; they smell and taste these. The mind's right hand man sees a white canvas aglow with possibility and afire with imagery.

Layering greens, an artist stows secret gardens beneath strokes of shade, while others undulate an ode with riddles thick as Bittersweet. They adopt method acting, defying time and gravity, emerging as connoisseurs of empathy and raconteurs of history. The experience of creation is synonymous with that of the audience: inspiration, interpretation, and innovation.

Deanna Elliot
May 2008

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Piercing the Sky

This spot on the top
Northeasterly I gander
Blue, Metal, Mountains

Economy

My father's death taught me about heat.
I pressed hot cloths against my face that winter
Over and over, taking me any place but grief.

Over and over, I pressed the cloths against
My eyes and cheeks until the memory
Became clear:
        His face filled with twigs we planted on him,
(pranksters at four and six, and he an accommodating druid) that day in the woods next to the reservoir.

And the memory of his candy boxes hidden before supper surprises
Became clear
And the cold house he kept,
And the winter open window for health,
And the ships that carried us
  to the Louvre, Versailles, and Sacré Coeur,
because we could keep a cold house,
Became clear.

We learned economy and holding back
And the warmth of loves' extended steady hand.

Christine Newsham

A Trendy Winter
acrylic on canvas
Richard Yarde Art Award winner

Ridge Walker

Whenever I wasn't sleeping I'd try to be outside. My mother would make me know there was never a reason to worry— I'd always be taken care of. Our family lived near a reservoir that had frogs, beautiful cranes, with an occasional pelican flying over. Chris Joung told me they were pterodactyls. My mother said they were a representation of Jesus in medieval bestiaries.

A construction company drained the reservoir for a new subdivision, leaving only squirrels and sparrows. Deer would visit our yard. My mother put a new salt lick up every few months with scattered apples in a clearing behind the house.

That's where an older boy molested Chris' sister. He had nothing better to do than bother little children like us. It was in my tent. It was my friend's sister, and my parents were afraid of telling her parents because they were inside watching television when it happened. I cried when they told me how I would help by talking to the police. I only remembered him using a spoon when I started eating my soup. Telling them as it almost touched my mouth. Years later, children next door told me how demons would scratch out my eyes in hell for being a sinner. I responded by throwing blocks of ice at them. It was like looking at a crack in a dam, wondering why water hadn't broken through its walls yet.

I'm stuck here buying field greens and cheese at a market a few streets away—tired of information. It would be better if you could sit on a cliff, overlooking a sea of kelp, waiting for soil beneath to erode pushing you out of life. That place doesn't exist for many of us, or even possible to get there. I know it's somewhere. Jan will be home soon. Ready to eat. With her drowsy eyes staring at me, like my grandmother's before port and tonic.

"Please, let's ride bikes somewhere before I have to go back and finish work."

We do ride to a park where many trees are. They often shudder in the wind. My tree is the beech and hers is the willow. Our trees are similar in how gangly they become, even though a willows branches

never really touch the ground. Only it's leaves brush it. Where as a beech's thick branches creep slowly downward flowing across perpendicularly like outstretched arms. They tend to be meek staying a few inches or feet above. Once a man fell out of my tree when a branch he stood on broke. I was devastated.

If you like this time we're spending at the park, than you'll really love when I go to war in the future. We're fighting for algae, fish, and wells in your yard. I own tanks filled with water, you own a parking lot made from biodegradable plastic. When I look at cities lined with vertical farms and my friends in Idaho live in dense forests, while their cousins float around our oceans in water-pods looking for a tether. I feel hopeful.

***

"Are you finished, I need help carrying this." Allen says to me as I crawl out of my sac.

"Let me get my pants on."

"I need to get beans on the stove before they wake up."

"I'm done. Where do you want it?"

"You smell that smoke blowing off the mountains?"

"Yeah I did. Wind isn't blowing this way. No fire today."

"I get worried sometimes."

"Heard cold air will push over us soon."

"Yeah?"

"Don't worry."

Every day we go through twenty pounds of beans. That feeds thirty of us along with some vegetables we grow in trays ourselves. We're pretty well balanced here. Sixty gallons of water is good for a day. Gives a guy a shower twice a week. Often we'll find one taking sips out of the reservoir. And that's a shame.

Allen's eyes sit on double bags, dark as dusk, he hardly stops, when he does take a break he never sleeps, always awake thinking. Some wonder if he ever relaxes. An average mind goes numb after a day of worrying. We're only supposed to think about the availability of water, food and, companionship. That is it, they say. I tell Allen he thinks about the wrong things, he should focus on what we have here, not a life he left, because Allen seems to forget he is part of a

group, who is guarding the only functional reservoir within a hundred miles.

I'm less important than others. I say I could die tomorrow for all I care. I have no children. Don't want any either. Food, air, water—it's here. Knowing I could die today or tomorrow for this pond, knowing everyone but a few jowly men hiding beneath concrete in Raven Rock, could die too. But Allen's anxieties meddle with mine. I'm sure never to tell him. I never take the pills they give us. I'd rather my heart jump out my mouth, than shrug off a dead body.

A trail runs through trees going up a hill to where we are, each at a different spot along the ridge over the reservoir. It rarely rains in the summer, but in winter and early spring we're soaked through in mud. Some of us are further down along the ridge, a few on top where the ridge overlooks the ocean. Trees are massive, though most look like they had cosmetic surgery, where their canopy forms higher than usual, with not many underlying branches. Nothing ever happens, though it's definitely better than other places.

I haven't been home in five years, often I think of walking through the woods. I could get to Jan in three days. Maybe I could move when the rains come, to give me some cover. It could take weeks. If she is still there.

"Get Alejandro to switch with Isaac on ridge, I want to send him out today. You know we got information about some people trying to get near us."

"Well, you know how he is. He keeps talking about how he might get a call from his wife about their upcoming newborn baby. We don't want another anxious kid up on ridge thinking about that."

"What else can someone think about up here? Always having to look for death never does anyone good. We'll have a guy with his fly down constantly pissing on a tree—eyes to bark. I mean, unless you want him to piss against the wind. You tell him to go. I'll get back to the beans."

How old was I when I last thought of the future? I remember being unable to read any news because my mind would race. I felt overwhelmed with the idea that my own thoughts would someday cease. A hot grinding action. Never able to love again, speak, or—Jan. Those fears come but I don't think of the future anymore. Sometimes, when I think of escaping I picture my wife and I living

'off the grid' and away from any suffering. I guess that is a future. I'm sure many think that way.

The end has been creeping over the horizon since man ate his first crab by the seashore. By the time shells were heaped beyond his brow, man was praying for God to exist, that any fears were attributed to something greater. His mind was crushed by the weight of other's paranoia. Their bullshit gestures hiding sincere emotions. I have to swallow them. A replication of the past, that's what they are.

***

Alejandro switched with Isaac. Either he got shot in the face, or killed himself months later when his wife died. I just know he got shot. He smoked too much anyway. I don't smoke, and I hardly drink. Let's not talk about my purpose, or who would care if I died today, or tomorrow.

***

I radio Allen. "You mind coming here and taking over? I want to go check something near the dock. I need some relief."

"What is it?"

"Just some children trying to launch a raft. Thought they could use some help."

"Help? You best tell them to not do stupid things like that. That water is awful, they will be dead before they get a hundred yards out, little babies bashed against rocks, eaten by pelicans."

Where did they come from? What town? I don't know. But they already want to get away. We tap pomegranates with spoons and eat their seeds. I tell stories of my childhood, about how exciting it was. How much my mother loved me. My friends were wonderful; we would go camping in woods behind my house.

A boy named Chris whose hopeful eyes are now empty tells me,

"We're tired of this, our parents are never home. My mother hasn't been around for a month. My dad comes back every few days and changes, hardly saying hello. I loved it at first but now we just want to get away, and find a better place. At least we have our friends.

They are everything"

I launch the children, smiling and waving as they cheer hitting their first breaker. Before I know it they are gone, well beyond any rocks.

Behind me I hear gravel falling down the path, it sounds like a deer. I ignore it, than it starts nudging me with one of its antlers. I remember Jan tracing her finger across my back. There is more pressure. I turn around his eyes are angry as though I betrayed him. It's Allen with his rifle.

"Henry, it's time to go. They've been calling for three days. You can't do this."

A sparrow flies over us, fluttering, lifting with a cool draft off the ocean, continuing towards the ridge.

Cagen Luse

Self
acrylic on canvas

Daisy

A glint of sunlight reflected off a gilded frame on the mantle, distracting him a moment from the task at hand.

The picture, a young woman in a long green dress, windblown hair seemingly suspended by millions of invisible strings, miles of pristine Napa Valley vineyards stretched out behind her, made him cry.

Frozen in the confines of that frame was one moment, a moment sixteen hours after they'd exchanged their wedding vows. He loved her then.

Now. Three years later, two bliss, the other despair.

She lay motionless, glassy blue eyes staring at the ceiling above her, in the hospital bed delivered to their house weeks before.

She'd come home to rest after the doctors decided nothing more could be done for her. She rested as a daisy rests in a dry vase, withering.

A doctor stood on the other side of the bed. The man who had convinced him that she was gone, the man who had taken all his dreams from him.

"It's been eight months since her accident. She's only alive because of those machines. Alive meaning her lungs rise and fall, her heart beats. She's gone," the words he had said some weeks ago.

The man sat by her with her heavy hand, like a lump of cold seaweed, encased in his own. He held his breath within him, trapping life in his lungs, not allowing it to escape.

The rhythmic call of the heart monitor was the only sound in the room. His fist closed tightly around the electrical cord. He quickly pulled it from the wall.

For a moment, one that seemed like a lifetime, the machines continued to call out, her chest continued to rise and fall. He continued to hope.

In an instant, it all stopped.

Jasmine Jiang

They Carried Her Away
pencil

Matt Mazzola

Truck
digital photography

Blue States

An Islamic sliver of moon rises-- a scythe without a hammer.
In the Indian-corn-blue sky of early evening--
She moves around with eyes painted on her eyelids
selling yellow Sunday newspapers from summers ago
while Italian lights shine nostalgia from storefront windows.

New England liberals pass
dragging their children through cafes and shopping malls,
wrapping them in heavy coats and long scarves
dragging them in from some infinite expanse--
as if streaming them through blue cathode tubes.

Earlier, on a fall afternoon
she slept a dreamless sleep at the reading window of the Brookline Library,
The Nation crumpled in the lap of her wool coat.
her bones ache, though the dank of summer has left
and her mind, is stilled--
the sky being so blue, so cold and cloudless;

The world, has suffered too
much is too old beneath her t.v. screen eyes;
she has nothing to reveal now.
No, like a scarf or a cold gust of autumn leaves she envelops us,
repeating all other leaves and blues;
plunging us back again from some infinite expanse.

Far, not too far, from the frozen plasma images
of football and presidents and insurgencies,
she bums a cigarette
and lights the night's first
in a blue nicotine glow.
Here in the freeze frame of the first puff,

in the smoky delta of chemical haze lifting,
or, far away, in the penetrating silence before a roadside bomb,
before the scuttling of daughters and sons, mothers and fathers,
before the maiming of sisters and brothers,
on the night after the holiday,
not long after she's taken her tattered things and left,
the streets and newspapers
the cigarette buts, and broken televisions
gently streams,
the watery soul of America
through leaf-clogged drains and pine chimneys.

Matt Mazzola

Dumpster
digital photography

brookline (near fall)

days of atonement
creep in like
old, old fingers.
a chill hides
in the brief
interstices of
oak & maple,
evergreen
even ginko.

leaves hang from
trees only sick or not yet
in boom.
they do not commit,
they fall, are
scattered alongside
stony sidewalks—
scuffed or chewed by roots.
one breathes
traces of
dried paper notes,
hears acorns
smashed,
gutted &
falling,
whooshing to the
ground or
crunching
underfoot—
awaiting a
second-spring when
all this comes through
in orange & red.

gray
beacon street is
torn by the
incisors of a
rusty, yellow
Caterpillar—a
mechanical
dinosaur
digging for bones.
still, the
low sun
dances upon
apartments,
drug stores,
synagogues.
summer lingers in
birch trees,
ballfields &
beer gardens.

outside
Starbucks the
wild tom-turkey
trots a
dumb, graceless
hipster trot.
soon he will
see the shine of the
butcher's cleaver.
while others sip spiced
pumpkin lattes.

this near
evening
near fall
one: anticipates
solemn friday evening

parades.
sees ants swarming a
dappled crab apple,
remembers how he
stopped
after a rainstorm to watch a
crushed
garden slug.

washington square's
bronze clock
gestures the
bleary sun to kip
behind the old
brownstones.
chinese food
blankets the air as a
busy couple
grabs egg-foo &
a six-pack for
Must-See
Tee-Vee.

Matt Mazzola

Train Yard
digital photography

A Shade in the Grove

Drew swung the scythe and the swaying wheat fell. Mowing hay by hand was hard labor, but the workday was nearly over. He was glad to see the hot sun setting over the half-finished field. A light breeze cooled him while it scattered the loose stalks. It was nearly suppertime and he looked to the single-level white house in the distance as his stomach rumbled. Mom would have cooked another big dinner, the excuse being that she was happy to have him home after being away for four years.

He passed the small grove that lay in the middle of the field. It was a wild, tangled, thing that looked out of place in the otherwise neat pasture. Even at midday it was hard to see very far between its tousled limbs. The bunch of thorny boughs looked as if they'd been there for a long time, though the trees never got taller. If the grove grew at all it must have grown inward, as it was no bigger now than when Drew was a child.

The little green crabapple hit Drew in the back when he was only a yard past the trees. He turned around to see a petite female figure standing close to grove's edge, wearing nothing but a waist-length crop of brown hair. Her skin looked pale green and he thought the sun must have gotten in his eyes. She smiled and threw another little apple, which hit him in the shoulder. It didn't hurt.

"Hello?"

The girl tossed one last little fruit and leapt back into the trees. Drew stepped closer to the grove. He peered in. It was impossible to see more than a foot into the dense brush.

"Hello? Who are you? This is private land."

There was no response. He warily circled the thick growth. It didn't seem wise to enter without a way to see where he was going. He resumed his walk home but looked over his shoulder twice. When he was nearly at the back door he thought he saw movement, but it might have just been the wind blowing the brush around. He leaned the old schythe against the house and entered.

Dad was at the kitchen table reading the newspaper. A small turkey and some potatoes were laid out in ceramic bowls.

"Mom's gone out to the store. She says she's been running out of groceries quick since you came back." Dad adjusted his glasses. He didn't even look up from the paper.

Drew nodded. He fixed himself a plate and sat down opposite his father.

"You have anything lined up yet?" his father asked him.

"Not yet. You know I want to spend summer back here."

"Just looking out for you. Summer's about over and I don't want you to get too used to working here. You stay here much longer and nothing's ever gonna change. Don't waste that degree."

"I know."

"Given any thought to what you want to do with it?"

"I might go back to school."

"Really."

"Yeah."

"Why's that?"

"Dunno," Drew shrugged.

"I was talking to Ed Simmons. He said his brother might know of an opening up there in town."

"That's good."

"You might want to talk to Ed."

"Yeah."

There wasn't anything else to say. Their forks and knives scraped the plates.

"I'm thinking of cutting down the grove."

"What?"

"I said I'm thinking of cutting down the grove. Been a waste of good land, I think."

"That little patch? How much could you get out of it?"

"Dunno. Seems like a waste is all. Not good for anything."

"But it's been there since you bought the farm. It's never been good for anything. Why now?"

Dad put down the paper. "What's it matter? I'm cutting it down. It's my land and I can do what I want with it."

"Just seems like it's coming out of nowhere."

Dad shrugged. The news resumed its position between them. There was a grunt from him that could have meant anything. They finished eating.

I can count on you to finish that part of the field tomorrow?" It was more a forecast than an inquiry.

"Yeah."

A quiet minute passed.

"Dad?"

"Yep?"

"You bought the land from Joe Hastings, right?"

"Yep."

"It's a pretty good bunch of land."

"Yup."

"Why did he sell it? Didn't he end up working for the Barons?"

"Clyde and Anna Baron, yeah he did. Guess Joe just didn't want the responsibility of owning the farm anymore. Tougher than you think, being your own boss."

"Was the grove around when you bought it?"

"You still on that? Yeah, it was. Wasn't much different either."

"Did he think it was a waste of land?"

"Never asked." They allowed the conversation to die for a moment. Drew revived it.

"Did Joe ever look into it?"

His father sighed and put down the paper. He opened his mouth to speak but let it close. And then, "What are you getting at?"

"What do you mean?"

"You've seen it, haven't you?"

"'It'?" Drew asked.

"You've seen her, right?"

"The…you mean the girl? Dad, is there a girl living in there?"

"Dunno. I'm not sure what she's doing there."

"Is that why you're cutting it down, because she's living in there?"

There was a long, drawn-out exhalation. Dad crossed his arms. He looked around as if he were looking for a way out. "Drew, boy, I don't know that you'd say she was living anywhere. I started seeing her a month after I bought the farm. Your mom and I had been married nearly a year. I don't know what that girl is doing out there. I saw her for the next ten years of my marriage and she never changed. Is that living?"

"What then?"

"What do you mean, 'what then'?"

"You said you saw her for ten years, what happened then?"

"I stopped seeing her," he said, resigned. He speculated: "Maybe she didn't want to show herself to me anymore. Maybe figured I'd gotten too old and weren't fun anymore. By then you were around, and your brother and sister. I'd built a life for you all."

"Did you ever wonder what she was doing in the trees? Didn't you wonder what it was like in there?"

Dad sighed. "Yeah I did…now don't you go getting ideas. Find yourself something solid and real. I put myself into this land. This land is real. It's something that can bring you up if you keep your feet on it. Get a job in the city with that degree of yours. Find an office in some big stone building. Climb the ladder. Climb upwards. Raise yourself a family and don't pay attention to that foolishness out there. Where would you be if I'd gone around chasing weird girls all the time?"

They heard the sound of the front door as it opened and Mom walked in with the groceries. Drew helped put a few bags away. Mom asked mostly the same questions that Dad had. Yes he was going to find a job. Yes it was windy out. Yes supper was good. Sure he'd talk to Ed tomorrow. He excused himself. Dad went into the living room and say on the recliner to finish reading. Mom followed him there and sat on the couch to read some trashy romance novel.

The sun wasn't visible but there was still a rosy hue over the world when Drew left the house. The wind whipped the chaff around his feet. He stood in front of the grove and tried fruitlessly to peer into the darkness, while the day's little remaining sunlight evaporated.

Jasmine Jiang

Mistaken Identity
colored pencil

Madam John

Cafe Montego was the only "in school" working cafe completely run by students with learning disabilities in the United States. It was the brainchild of John Tompkins, educator extraordinaire, who struggled with severe dyslexia his entire life. John had to memorize everything he learned in school to get his teaching degree, practically a miracle considering that John was born in 1941 and there was no help for kids with learning disabilities back then. His Cafe Montego dream came true and he somehow managed to convince both the Russian and Chinese governments to adopt similar experiments. Cafe Montego II & III were founded after John had been invited to those countries as a goodwill ambassador. In a short span of time, John magically persuaded two schools in faraway, Communist countries to go along with his program. Pretty amazing when you think of the years it took him to convince the Boston Public School Committee, who only would agree after John promised and assured them that it wouldn't cost a penny, that all funds would come from the Cafe. If you are lucky, maybe once in your lifetime, a real-life everyday hero comes along and shares his gift with you, but like all heroes, they cannot stay long enough.

"I'm all fagged out," were John's first words as he walked in the bar. He still had his cooking apron on and it was fluttering up and down from his hand motions. "Sit down, will ya, before you get us all killed." He sat down with such dramatic flair that we knew a tragic story was going to follow.

"One of my chocolate students hid the keys to my car IN THE CAR! Locked in the car! ...Two Buds please," he called to the waitress. John always ordered two beers at a time because he hated to wait and the waitress would always be busy when he was ready for that second, or so that was his story.

John Tompkins called himself Madam and signed his checks Madam John, pretty brave for a guy in 1979. He also taught a very unique culinary class to inner-city kids with learning disabilities. Hiding his homosexuality was not an option for Madam. He was

flamboyant and eccentric and was what he was. He never had to say he was gay; there was no closet big enough to hold him in. He encouraged all his students to be whatever they dreamed. He would not allow society to make the rules, because they had done a pretty bad job as far as he was concerned. In his classroom there were elegant chocolate, vanilla, and sideways (Asian) students only. No racial slurs or slang were ever allowed. It was never the "white" kid did this or the "black" kid did that. It was the sideways kids who made the fried rice special or the elegant chocolate little girl who ran the register.

I know this might sound unbelievable in this day and age of political correctness, but once you were caught in Madam's huge gravitational field, once you saw and felt his passion and extreme commitment to his students, you would be talking just like him in no time. Madam's words and expressions united all skin colors through humor and style, turning the seemingly shocking and offensive statements into affectionate terms of endearment. Even the other teachers learned John's language and inside that schoolroom/cafe, a whole other world existed. Everyone knew the rules and everyone more than happily stuck to them. In the 14 years of Cafe Montego, not one fight ever occurred.

In Madam John's classroom, everyone was on the same playing field and everyone entered the same way: through the window, onto the radiator and two steps to the floor. Each morning after homeroom, all the kids in Madam's class went right out to the parking lot and in through the window. As Cafe Montego gained notoriety and caught the attention of politicians, the press, and local celebrities, they would one by one all come to visit through the window. Gay, straight, or sideways, the window is always open.

Madam spent his nights and weekends working at The Swiss House Restaurant in Dorchester for extra cash so that he could pursue his second passion, traveling. This is where we met in 1979. I was the chef and he worked the line. Throw in a half dozen more cooks and we became quite a close-knit bunch of characters. Madam was the queen of us all, and each and every one of us adored him.

"I'm in Etrusca!" Madam John had called the restaurant collect. "What are you talking about? You're supposed to be here today," I

said.

Where is Etrusca anyway?

"Well, last week David told me there was no such place as Etrusca anymore and I knew it was somewhere in Europe, so here I am sitting beside an elegant giant shrew." By this time, my head was spinning. So much work had to be done, but the conversation was too good to hang up on. I wasn't even sure if he was really in Etrusca until the next weekend when Madam John showed up with a photo of him sitting beside a huge stuffed Etruscian Shrew in Etrusca, Italy! That's what the postcard said when it arrived at the restaurant about a month later. After that, we all would find strange places on the map and try to get Madam to go.

'Sunday mornings come too fast. It seems like it was just 5 minutes ago when my mother was waking me up to go to Sunday Mass last week. I remained at home long after all my siblings left. I just couldn't stand the thought of Mom alone here. Sunday Service is something we've done together since I was a little boy and I really enjoy it. Even when I am traveling, no matter where I am, I will find that Sunday Mass. I promised her and I haven't broken that promise yet. I know how the Catholic Church feels about old queens like me, but I forgive them anyway. It wasn't the devil that put me here so you do the math. Besides, there is nothing in this world that makes me happier than sitting beside my mother in church, singing all the elegant hymns as loud as I can. It's heaven on earth for me and even if we had to sit outside on the sidewalk, I'd still do it. I even found an underground Catholic service when I was in Russia in 1984. It was quite a gay affair. Those Orthodox Russian Priests really know how to wear that dress. And that big tall Sunday bonnet practically hit the ceiling. It was held in a basement apartment. I was more afraid going to that service than I was of them finding out I was gay. Of course they had no idea of what the English word "gay" meant anyway and I got a lot of people to say it as they pleaded with me to teach them English words. I would tell them my name is "Gay John" and in their best Russian accents, they all tried to call me that, even the priest. I know it was just silly on my part, but what can I say, I'm a silly old queen. On the other hand, everyone in Montreal knew what "gay" meant. It would be on the way to Sunday Mass in Canada, that Madam would come face to

face with a guy who had already decided that there is nothing silly about the word "gay".

"I thought you'd never show up!"

Madam was late and the morning rush was well underway. Everyone by now was screaming out orders and the organized chaos of a busy weekend morning was straining on everyone. Crissy who worked the counter had just come into the kitchen complaining about the corn muffins again. "They're too dry," she would whine. It was a weekly ritual that we all would ignore, but for some reason Madam's temper got the best of him. He picked up the corn muffin and first put it in his right hand, then for some reason decided to switch it to his left hand and tried to toss the muffin at her. The sight of Madam John trying to figure out what hand to throw with was beyond hysterical. I have never seen so many people erupt into laughter at someone so furious in my life. It took awhile for John to see the humor, but eventually he did. We all took turns later teaching Madam how to throw a proper corn muffin. To this day, no one knows if he was left or right handed when it came to tossing things at people.

It was Friday, October 30th, 1993. John had just shown up at my house. He had two small stuffed Koala Bears in his hand. He had recently come back from a trip to Australia. It was the only continent he had never traveled to. Now he had been to them all; even Antarctica. He was in a hurry because he was on his way to Montreal for the weekend. He came to tell me he would miss our annual Halloween Party. I gave him such a hard time about leaving, reminding him that to miss Halloween is about as close to mortal sin as you can get in the gay world. After a few cups of "tea" (John's word for beer) and a cross-his-heart promise to make next year's bash, he was off.

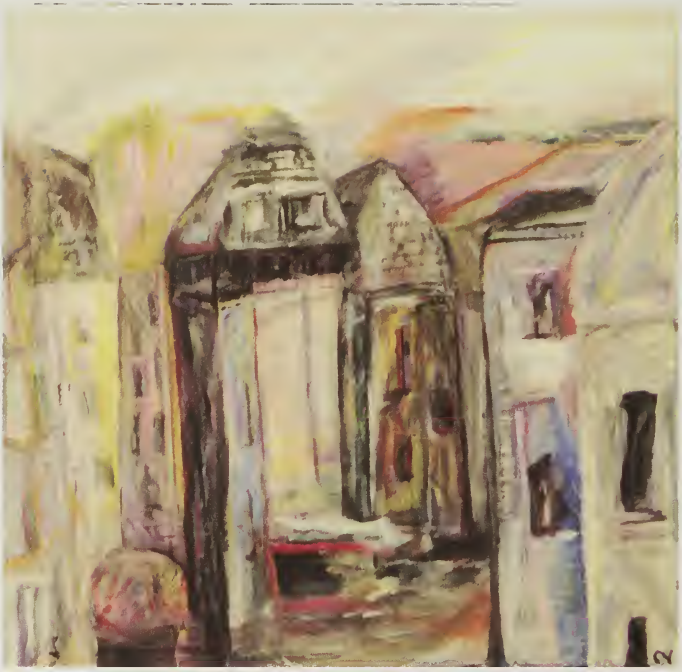
"Toodleloo, ladies, I'll see you next weekend."

What is it that creates such hate in a man that it consumes him till he decides to cross that line into evil? Is it in the religion he follows or the home he was brought up in or the streets that he played on? Is it the fact that gay bashing is an accepted right of passage in young men's lives in most parts of the country/world? Or is it simply the fact that a man can walk out of a known gay bar and someone else can decide that he is not worthy to live and that

probably most people won't care anyway.

I read about Madam's death that Monday morning in the Boston Globe. He had just left a gay bar where he stopped for a cup of "tea" on his way to Sunday Mass. A man who saw him leave decided it was time to get rid of one of those fags he sees all the time. He would murder John with his own hands on the streets of Montreal. Madam John didn't have a chance. He wouldn't even have known what hand to use to throw a punch. He'd never had to throw one in his life. He'd taken them, many times, but never hit back. His murderer would get 3 years in prison for involuntary manslaughter. After all, it was just some queer from the U.S., some gay man named Madam.

Christine Newsham



Amsterdam
acrylic on canvas

Slips of Fate

The sunny morning turned into a gloomy afternoon and soon there was a drizzle. Tanvi stood near the window wrapped in a shawl.

"What an erratic weather!" she mumbled and moved away.

Her two-year-old Spaniel was lying quietly on the carpet, muzzle on her paws and a pair of eyes following her mistress's movements. "Come baby," Tanvi said. Champagne let out a soft bark and followed Tanvi out of her bedroom.

There were framed photographs hung on the stairway wall which led to the living room downstairs. Photographs that nearly covered the wall unfolding her life story and yet, one was missing.

The living room was austere.

"Less is classy," Sameer had said while he was decorating the room. Interior decoration, Sameer's department. Her interest was gardening, which actually started two years back. In fact, a lot of things happened then - she got Champagne, joined a kindergarten as a teacher and above all, the incident that led to all these.

Tanvi sat on a couch near the French window that opened into the garden she tended so lovingly. The house was located in a Kathmandu suburb. Many evenings as the sky turned crimson against the mountains, Tanvi could spend hours on the terrace savoring the beauty of nature. They had bought the house after selling their old one which Sameer thought small after being appointed CEO. He was a workaholic and very ambitious, and many times Tanvi found him difficult to relate to. He was very different from her.

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"You are so much like me," Aditya said on the third day of their meeting. He was a Nepali-born American resident working in a corporate firm in California. He had come to conduct a ten-day workshop, which Tanvi was attending as a management trainee.

"Tomorrow is Saturday," he said and added, "Can we go out for lunch?"

Tanvi said yes.

After a quiet lunch, they opted for a coffee shop which wasn't crowded. She could feel Aditya's eyes on her as she sipped her latte. He told her how he moved to America, got married and settled there. "I have a daughter, a year old," he said pulling out a photograph from his wallet.

He held it out for her to see. In the picture, Aditya was carrying his daughter. The little girl had blue eyes.

"Doesn't she have lovely eyes?" he asked with a smile.

Tanvi nodded.

"Her mother has those too," he said and sighed.

"We got divorced ... recently." The last sentence came quite unexpectedly to Tanvi. "I love my wife and I wish she would know that. But she wanted to leave and I had to let her go. I get to meet my daughter only on Saturdays." There was so much of sadness in his eyes as he said this.

"I am so sorry." Tanvi's said in a voice that was hardly audible. "Thanks," Aditya said. She looked away.

Her feeling for Aditya was incomprehensible. Could love happen in such a short time? But if time was a measure then why did people fall out of love after years of being together? But again how could she fall for someone who was clinging on to his past. Despite the confusions, there was something she could see in his eyes. What she also knew was that he was holding himself back, and for some reason. Things remained unspoken between them. Aditya left and was out of touch, leaving many questions unanswered.

Then Sameer came along and before she knew she was married to him.

Ajay was born premature - tiny, fragile and with heart complications. Tanvi's motherhood was shadowed with fear. With each passing day, his health deteriorated and Tanvi kept wishing for a miracle to happen. She named him Ajay - the unconquerable. And hoped that he would fight the situation destiny had put him into.

Words can have immense power; one can gain an enemy or lose a friend, can break a heart or mend it, can cause a war or stop it; just by mere words. Yes, those mere words that were never spoken between her and Aditya. If only they were spoken ... who else could know the power of words better than Tanvi? But that day, outside

the Intensive Care Unit when the doctor approached her with a somber face and just shook his head, she realized that silence could be as powerful.

Her baby had died. The Unconquerable, conquered by death. The world had known him for just a month but she had known him and felt him much longer - from the time when he was nothing but a dot in her womb.

After Ajay, life wasn't the same for Tanvi. She left work and submerged in her thoughts. While Sameer was emotionally supportive, his preoccupation with his profession left her all alone. She couldn't understand if Sameer was insensitive or if he was camouflaging his pain. During such times, she didn't know why, but she thought a lot about Aditya and his blue-eyed daughter. She tried remembering the color of Ajay's eyes and wished she had taken his picture, but he never gave her enough time for that.

It took a long time for Tanvi to get back to her normal life. She realized that being near to nature eased her pain - so she started gardening. After Sameer got Champagne, she showered all her love upon the dog. But somehow, they never planned for another child ... Tanvi didn't even feel like having one. Instead, she joined a kindergarten to be amongst children.

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Time passed slowly. Had Ajay been alive, he would have been walking, talking, breathing. The drizzling stopped and the sky cleared up. Champagne was curled up beside her. It was good to have Sundays off. Sameer was at work.

Tanvi looked up at the sky through the French window. When she was young she thought it was a blue solid roof and if she had a long ladder she could touch it. Years later she understood that no matter how high one went, there would be nothing to touch - just void.

Magdalene's Soliloquy

With your wings camouflaged,
I mistook you for just another jaguar in the jungle.
I expected a quick night of it, and pounced.
On the sprint home, we undressed the city,
block by block.
For sure, you acted wild.
Nothing in your gestures or your fangs
led me to suspect you weren't just another predator, easy
to dismiss, so easy to devour.
Yet once there, in the wilderness of my bed,
that thunder in your loins belied the ethereal in your face.
When you invited the moon to join us, I might have known.
In truth, accepting any flight
save lust
was my unraveling. I understood the native
rolling from your tongue, and found a syntax
fluid in these limbs.
For once,
the entangling did dispel the lie.
And that bleeding on the sheets ---far from sacrificial---
was just me saying, after all those nights,
what the hell I meant,
after all those tricks,
how I felt.

Amanda Huff

What I Learned In My First Semester of College

mixed media collage

Sinai

Almost pure again, lying by the water, toes stroking shell-filled sand.
My give-away eyes watch you, contemplatively
Weighing what I can't quite articulate clearly
But to my own mind
And all the while, believe me
I wanted to fall for you and your unbroken youth.

Direct Address

Lover, lover,
Here is the bed
Death, not death
And yet not yet
Your name no matter
Here is the bed
Myth, not myth
As if and yet
Let me undo your
Presence a bit

Lover, lover
Here is a name
Your myth a death
Undoing undid
The bed no matter
Your body a dream
And yet not quite
And quite, not yet

Lover, lover
Here is the bed
Your grave my cradle
Your crib my grave
No matter your matter
Your name unsaid
It is only the absence
We sleep with

A myth not myth
And yet not death
Lover, lover
Here is my breath

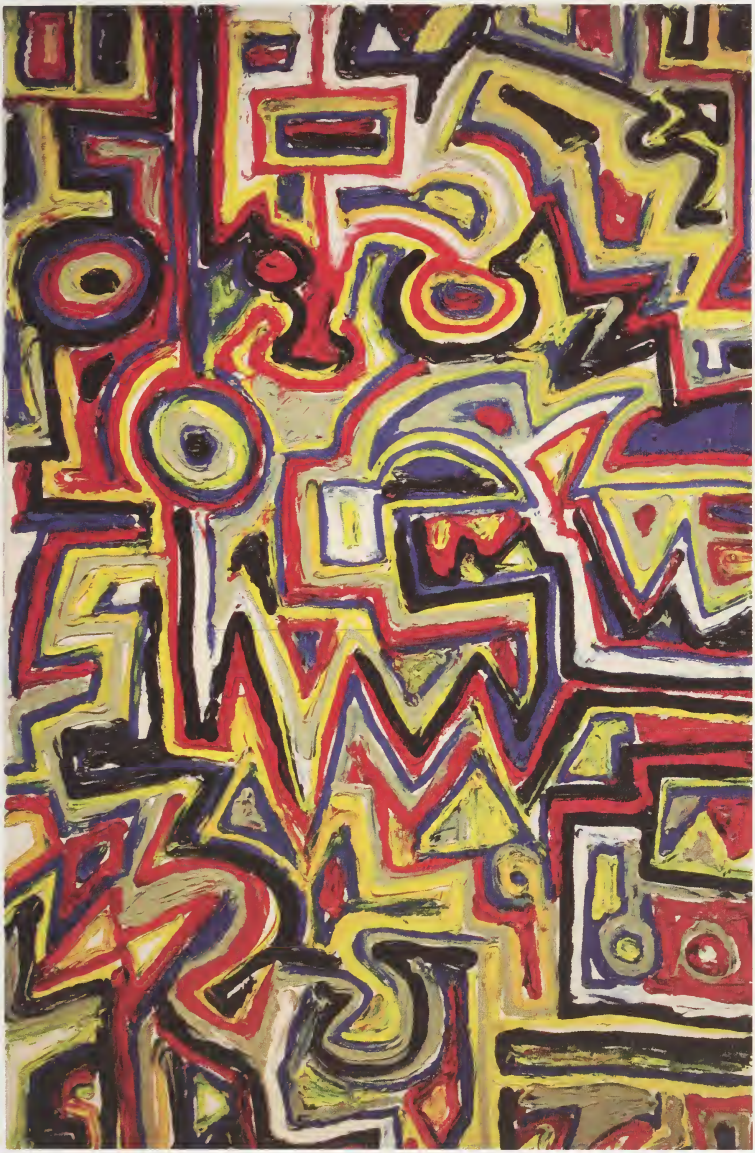
My lips my body
As yet undid un-
Doing as if
Your matter were myth
And myths were all
We could lie with

Purple Lady
acrylic on canvas

Light Bulb Jam

I'm eighteen years old, decent looking,
desperately insecure,
so naturally I am dating this complete ass.
We attend a fat Christmas party at his friend's
over on Mountain View Drive;
We pull up, "Smells Like Teen Spirit" blaring,
get out of his silver Bug
and smoke some Jamaican weed
outside by this wicked large potted cactus.
He opens the door to the modern glass box;
I lag behind knowing the scenario:
Rich wasted kids (Mind you not me, not rich anyway),
no parents, lots of alcohol, drugs.
He grabs a Heineken and busts it open,
waits for it to adapt to the sudden release of pressure,
sucks it down.
One, two, three—
ten later he is standing next to this beautiful Frasier Fur,
brightly lit with large blue, red and orange lights;
Very Merry.
There are cheers as he dangles
a red bulb over his face
with his stupid, grinning mouth wide open—
He drops the bulb in and chews,
then swallows.

For years I watch this.



PIT R KROUK
acrylic on canvas

2,921 Days

He had a stubbornness that, oftentimes, was more powerful than his charisma, which is what first attracted her to him.

She remembered the first time she saw him standing across the packed dance floor of some cheap college bar. She remembered thinking that he was the most handsome man she'd ever seen in her life. He seemed perfect, as if he were some marble specimen of masculinity come to life. She'd fallen in love. Even though her natural practicality had always told her it was an impossibility, she'd done it.

"Go talk to him," her girlfriends prodded. Pulsing lights swayed across the room in a rainbow of luminescent intensity.

She felt as if she were floating on something more than just half a dozen long island iced teas, as if she were, even though her expediency would have told her it was "just silly," suspended on an air of flawlessness.

But, that was ten years ago. Those times were long gone.

That initial rush of passion she felt lived only in memory, an emotional specter of her own youthful abandon. Sometimes, on very rare occasions, that primordial ardor would threaten to manifest itself again for an instant or two. Somewhere in her peripheral vision she'd catch him standing in the backyard at a BBQ, the draining sunlight would fall on his face just right, streaming across those same peaks and valleys of Donatelloesque precision with a soft and gripping radiance. She would blink and he would return to normal again, aged and indifferent. He would stare off into the steamy twilight, the washed out blue of his eyes focused on the desert of backyards and cedar stockade fences.

Moments like that were fewer and getting farther between.

Their lives had become an assembly line of the mundane. There was work, he an accountant, she a secretary. Beyond work there was little else. They would eat dinner, carry on meaningless conversations, sometimes they would make quiet restricted love, and then sleep. Occasionally there were visits with neighbors or relatives

where they would smile and laugh. They lived a life seeped with normalcy.

It wasn't as if they were different people, fundamentally they were still the same as they were ten years before. Sure, they were a speck slower, the tint of their skin had dulled, and a few extra pounds could be found here and there. But, inside they generally felt things were the same.

It was life that had changed. They hadn't had time to prepare themselves for it, but it had happened anyway.

Many nights, like this one, the night before their 8th wedding anniversary, they would find themselves sitting in silence, her at the end of the couch and him in his easy chair. Her face, pale with tedium, was partially shielded from his view by the garish, taunting cover of a newly purchased romance novel. He was lost somewhere in the great labor camps of Soviet Russia. His body sat, unexcited, in his easy chair, long thin nose in a book, Solzhenitsyn.

They had fought some weeks before over what she simply called a "disagreement." He referred to it as an "absolute travesty." He wanted a child. She didn't. A brooding tranquility had draped itself over their reality ever since, like dusty sheets over aged furnishings in forgotten mansions. There was inertness, a deficiency.

Throughout those weeks of overwrought hush, as the distance between them increased gradually, she had hoped things would work themselves out. She hoped that somehow her life would fall back into what it used to be, back when their love for each other was evident in more than only thoughts.

She fell asleep that night; the few inches between them in bed seemed like an entire ocean of silent distance. She hoped that he hadn't forgotten.

He fell asleep in comfortable pacifism, his mind occupied with not much more than budgets and quarterly reports.

***

The next day at work went quickly for them both. It was almost like, in some strange way, it had never really existed in the first place.

The old Mercedes grumbled as it slashed through the long stretch

of Highway 5 where it leveled out beyond the water tanks. The jewelry store closed at 8 and it was now only 2 minutes of.
He knew how he could make her happy. And, that was all he really wanted, for her to be happy.

She just hoped that he hadn't forgotten. That was what she wanted, some recognition that he still loved her. That was what she missed most, the attention.

He hadn't forgotten. If fact, he had remembered - or was forced to remember is perhaps a better selection of words - a few days prior when he found a copy of that day's newspaper sitting on the couch. It just happened to be opened to an advertisement for that same jewelry store. The ad was of a man and a woman standing together in a living room, not unlike his own, in a frozen instant of misunderstanding. The woman's face was twisted in anger, like she could spit broken glass. The man's face was slathered with a roguish smile. He held behind his back, hidden from the woman but conveniently visible to the viewer, a glittering sapphire ring from that very jewelry store. It wasn't very subtle. He had taken the hint.

She had gotten home early to prepare a special celebratory dinner for him. But, she hadn't had a chance to get to dinner yet. Instead she stood, shaking, in the bathroom. A pregnancy test sat lonely on the countertop. She closed her eyes securely, hoping that when she opened them she would not see an alarming blue line. She pictured her own womb as a gaping space, empty and hollow, like a flesh walled cave. She steeled her nerves as she opened her eyes and looked down at her hand. The line was blue.

He pulled into the parking lot of the jewelry store and stared in at its obvious vacancy. His watch read 8:04. He was too late. He had failed.

He had planned on stopping before work, but ended up running late. He figured he would have plenty of time on his way home. And, he would have. He would have had hours if it weren't for Samantha.

Samantha Nelson was the young blonde who worked at the front desk of his office. Stunning would be too dull a word to describe her. In fact, on late winter evenings when the fading sunlight would drip into the office he would see her silhouette across the cubicles and swear to himself that no words existed capable of accurately describing her beauty. Her body swayed, almost cobra-like, when

she walked around the office.

He had been mesmerized by her from the moment he first saw her almost 6 months before. She was temptation, with a pair of robust breasts and a firm backside.

Recently, since the fight with his wife, he had gotten up the nerve to talk with, even flirt with, her.

That afternoon conformity had burst within him. Adventure had risen around him, euphoria ran through his veins.

When the work day was over, he made frantic love to that nymph in the front seat of his Mercedes. Parked in the darkened corner of an industrial park near her apartment, he consummated his moral demise. It was sex like he hadn't had in years. She was warm, receptive.

As she got out of his car in front of her apartment, he kissed her on the cheek, out of courtesy. Her aroma, like sexual lilacs, floated through the car after she left. She was exhilarating.

He closed his eyes tight and breathed deep, holding the ghost of his affair within him. He drove quickly down Highway 5. The jewelry store was his goal. The jewelry store, that ring, redemption. Having missed his goal, he sat in the car in the empty parking lot of the strip mall. He threw his tight fists against the steering wheel, like throwing pebbles against a brick wall, it was futile. It brought only pain, no ring.

She paced around the kitchen table, frantic, trapped. The room seemed to shrink, tightening in on her. She didn't want this, not really. But, he did. There were sacrifices that he had made for her. He had left the excitement behind. She could make a sacrifice for him. She could make him happy.

She poured herself a glass of wine and sat at the table. The burgundy liquid undulated as she tilted the glass from side to side. Miniscule droplets of merlot rained down upon the white countertop. She squeezed her hands tight around the stem of the glass as if it were his neck, trembling. She cried.

He had been driving for an hour when he pulled into the gravel parking lot. It was cold in his car. The scent was gone. It smelled stale, lost. He got out and walked through a meadow of chrome modernity. A neon sign reading "Charlie's Saloon" beaconed. He lowered his head as he walked through the front door into the

smoky mist of ruin.

She sat on the couch, her soft knees pressed tightly together as if she were unconsciously holding it inside of her. Her eyes were locked on the front door, more precisely the brass knob on the front door. She clenched her teeth tightly and breathed deeply through them, filtering all of her frustration.

"Happy anniversary, Frank. I'm pregnant," she practiced quietly. A sheepish smile crept across her shuddering lips.

Melissa Quethia Romain

Adam and Eve (Triptych)
charcoal on paper

Dining Room Table

My pen scratching today
has carved right through the paper
and scarred the old cherry table
where I write each morning:
this wedding gift from your mother
complete with strict instructions
for a fold-up, hard, cardboard,
velvet backed protective cover,
like the one she'd used to keep family
scrapes from showing.

Today's scars join the others.
The long jagged scratch
the day I learned of your first betrayal
and threw my car keys across the table
separating us.

Our son's round divots,
carved geometric patterns
shaping his frustrations
sitting night after night
before and empty page.

Nicks from kids' birthdays,
scrapes from the baptismal party
when your old girlfriend, uninvited
showed on the arm of the priest,
scratches from gatherings after births,
showers, graduations, your mother's funeral.

Someday the cherry table will
belong to our children.
You've inherited her story

and aren't I glad we had
no money for cover
and our scars are exposed.

Zachariah Hayes

New Life From Old Shoes
digital photography

Abigail Duffy

Melancholy and the Social Construction of Mental Disorders

Melancholia and other mental disorders are controversial in the manner of their categories and the implications that those categories have on society. Determining whether mental disorders are natural kinds, existing in their respective categories with or without human interaction or whether mental disorders are socially constructed into categories presents an initial problem. This problem is then further muddled by examining the symptoms of the disorders and the theories that attempt to explain the underlying causes for these disorders that vary in time and culture. These difficulties together show that melancholy and mental disorders are socially constructed concepts.

The classification of mental disorders is an evolving process that is neither static nor exact. Looking back at ancient texts in melancholia, we find that this category encompasses all of the various types of mental disorders that are acknowledged in modern psychology as well as some physical ailments such as gastrointestinal issues and epilepsy. This generalized category of melancholia fractured into various sub categories, and through time these categories have shifted and flexed by the theories of men like Kraeplin who had a profound impact on the classification systems by separating dementia praecox (modern day schizophrenia) from mood disorders. This shifting into different categories suggests that mental disorders are not natural kinds but rather categories structured to be of use to humans and psychology.

Natural kinds are categories that exist in the world outside of human convention. Gold is a natural kind as it has properties that are explicitly "gold" properties, and all gold has these properties. A person who is familiar with the properties of gold will have no difficulty in determining what is and what is not gold. In "Psychiatric Diseases are Not Natural Kinds", Peter Zachar wrote, "A natural kind is a pure kind, and once you have defined its essence, errors

in identification are eliminated." (168) These determinations about what is and what is not gold will be the same regardless of who is making the determinations, so long as the person knows the essence of gold. There is no subjective decision making involved. Based on this criterion there are few natural kinds in existence. To fit into the category of natural kinds, there must be an inherent property which all elements of the kind have and which is not open for subjective consideration.

Psychology is a discipline that depends on the interpretation of a patient's symptoms by a professional in the field. While there are specific guidelines in assessing a patient, it is very much a subjective task. On the use of categorization in modern psychology by the DSM-IV, Zachar wrote, "There are not always clear and distinct sets that define category membership. As the DSM-IV states, classification is not a cookbook affair; it sometimes requires clinical judgment that takes context into account"(169). This subjective interpretation is not of just the complaints of the patient, but of insights of the professional. While rigorous education and training may strive to objectify these interpretations, a psychiatric professional will nevertheless still be required to judge exactly what he deems to be a symptom of a person's mental state.

In assessing the entire patient one thing that a professional will look at is clothing choices, for example, socks. It can be thought that if a patient's socks do not match than this is a sign that he is out of touch with reality. I have chosen this example to bring up because my socks almost never match, which is not a matter of my being out of touch with reality but of my complete distaste for spending my time matching socks. While a psychiatric professional would not be likely to deem a person to be out of touch on this basis alone, but if a patient is being assessed and the professional has some potential reason to believe that the patient may be out of touch with reality, a simple thing like mismatched socks could sway the decision, possibly in the wrong direction if the person has the same feelings about socks as I do. Further, two profess-ionals may interpret "symptoms" in somewhat different ways. There are not concrete definitions with which a disorder can be universally assessed as can be done with gold and other natural kinds, suggesting that mental disorders are not in fact natural kinds.

Though mental disorders may not exist as natural kinds, this is not to say that the cate-gories that have emerged are not of use. Mental disorders are essentially grouped in a manner that is thought to increase human understanding. Groupings of this sort are practical kinds. On the use of the prototype model used in classification of disorders in the DSM, Zachar wrote:

> From the standpoint of pragmatism, theories and models are instruments that help us navigate through the world. Their validity is in their usefulness...Models are best considered prescriptions—possible tools for understanding the world rather than description. (170)

Through this assembled understanding there is the hope of successful treatment of a patient's symptoms.

Grouping mental disorders by symptoms may be useful for human understanding, however it does not necessarily assert that all disorders within a group have the same causal root. According to Kraeplin, mental disorders are disease processes with a long course. On this point, Radden wrote, "[D]iseases had a course, persisting and undergoing changes through long stretches of time; thus they required longitudal study." (259) Part of the need for this longitudal study was according to Kraeplin, necessary because different underlying diseases could manifest in similar symptoms and the only way to differential would be to follow the progression of the disease. This need for a long term analysis of mental disorders due to changing symptoms shows both that symptoms are not an exclusive feature of a particular disorder and therefore do not separate disorders into natural kinds.

The signs and symptoms of physical diseases overlap with various other diseases. A skin rash may be the result of an allergic reaction or of mites in the skin. To group all physical issues that manifest in skin rash together may be helpful in treating the symptoms of the problem-- itchy irritated skin--but cannot determine the underlying cause of the problem. The definition of the disease, the underlying pathological component, is only accomplished through objective testing. A diagnosis of mites is only confirmed by seeing the mites under a microscope. A diagnosis of an allergic reaction can be confirmed through allergy testing. On the other hand, mental disorders can be assessed, grouped, and treated by symptoms,

but the underlying problem cannot be confirmed in any objective manner because there is no known objective criterion. It is in fact not known whether there are any biological components that cause mental disorder. This further supports the idea that mental disorders are not natural kinds. In the essay, "Making Order Out of Disorder: on the Social Construction of Madness", Church wrote, "If there is no one biological condition that underlies all (or most all) instances of mental disorder, then it may well be that the disorder is a social construct." (11)

In modern psychiatry the criteria for having a disorder, though specifically different for each disorder, is a relatively short time frame in contrast to Kraeplin's assertion of a need for a long-term assessment. A diagnosis of depression requires typical signs and symptoms for somewhere in the magnitude if 3-6 months for example. In modern psychiatry, this period of symptoms is itself a diagnosable disorder; for Kraeplin it would have been one symptom set in the long course of an underlying disease. Modern psychiatry, then, has changed the requirements for what it means to have a disorder. This breaking down of symptoms into smaller separate diagnosis is of particular practical use in the era of medical treatment aimed at control of symptoms.

Grouping disorders characterized by delusions is useful in that delusions may be treatable with similar medications and lifestyle changes. It could be argued that the successful treatment of various cases of disorders that are characterized by delusions using the same or very similar methods is evidence that the root cause is the same or closely related. This however is not necessarily the case. In physical ailments, different diseases can manifest with the same symptoms which can often be treated with the same medications even though the underlying disease processes are not related. Nasal decongestants may successfully treat the symptoms of both a sinus infection and the common cold. These two ailments are similar in that each may present in clogged nasal passages. The symptom can be easily controlled with the use of nasal decongestants despite the underlying processes not being related. A sinus infection can be treated with antibiotics, suggesting a bacterial component, whereas the common cold is a virus which cannot be cured with medication. These two can be differentiated objectively but not by assess-

ing symptoms and symptom response to treatment alone.

Grouping by symptoms is of practical use but cannot be said to constitute groups of natural kinds because these symptoms can be resultant of differing underlying problems. Mental disorders, in contrast to physical diseases, cannot be confirmed through empirical testing. However, it cannot be negated that mental disorders are, in addition to being practical kinds, also natural kinds if indeed the underlying causal factors are found to fit the definition. The possibility would still exist for the mental disorders to in fact have specific empirical causes that are unique to each disorder. No such factors have yet to be discovered. However, instead of believing that mental disorders are natural kinds and looking forward to the day when this can be proven with scientific discovery, we can instead look back at the way that different theories of causal factors has changed to determine mental disorders' status of kinds.

The understanding of the cause of mental disorders is a matter of theoretical approach that lacks a means of confirmation. These theories have varied over time and culture and have shaped the cultural perception of mental disorders. Melancholia of the Renaissance was a glamorous ailment of which mainly men were afflicted. This attitude towards melancholia was promoted by Ficino's theory of the origin of melancholia. Ficino wrote:

> Because frequent agitation of the mind greatly dries up the brain, therefore, when the moisture has been mostly consumed—moisture being the support of the natural heat—the heat also is usually extinguished; and from this chain of events, the nature of the brain becomes dry and cold, which is known as the earthy and melancholic qualities. (90)

Part of Ficino's theory, which was not exclusive to him but seen as far back as Aristotle and in such influential writings as Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy claimed that melancholia was in part due to a superior intellectual capacity and the lifestyle of intellectuals. He also described astrology to be a major factor in the underlying cause of melancholia because of the role that it was believed to play in determining personalities. He wrote:

> The celestial (causes): because both Mercury, who invites us to investigate doctrines and, and Saturn, who makes us persevere in writing doctrines and retain them when discovered, are said by astronomers to be somewhat cold and dry...just

like the melancholic nature, according to physicians. And this same nature Mercury and Saturn impart from birth to their followers, learned people, and preserve and augment it day today. (90)

The astronomical causes that Ficino claims, help to formulate the cultural views of melancholia in the Renaissance by creating melancholia as an innate quality of intellectuals determined by birth and the heavens. Taking on these conditions, melancholia was not culturally perceived as a "disorder" during the renaissance, but as an attribute of those who were intellectually gifted. This view however was not static, but subject to the shifting causal views of melancholia and other mental disorders.

Freud's theory of melancholia greatly shifted the perception of the causes and the cultural view of melancholia. Freud's theory though not completely dismissing the early theories of melancholia, dramatically shifted the position of the root cause. Freud did not acknowledge any astrological cause, but an underlying psychological maladaption. Loss and the self were the focus of Freud's theory. He wrote, "[T]he loss of the object became transformed into a loss in the ego, and the conflict between the ego and the loved person transformed into a cleavage between the criticizing faculty of the ego and the ego as altered by the identification." (287) This shift from external (astronomical) to internal (psychological) causes led the way to the deglamor-ization of melancholia in which the afflicted person is viewed to be damaged, not chosen by the stars to be gifted.

Freud did maintain some connection with brilliance. However, this connection was set as an exemplary case, in which Freud reserved for application to distinguished men. In his essay, "Mourning and Melancholia", Freud uses the specific example of Hamlet to illustrate this form of melancholia while he refers to broad categories of women to illustrate the other, more demeaning version of melancholia. Schiesari discusses this tactic of Freud's in "The Gendering of Melancholia". She wrote:

It is indeed striking that in Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" the only named subject of Melancholia is Hamlet. The other examples Freud provides are mere types of women such as the deserted bride or the self-depreciating wife, suggesting that for Freud, Hamlet's pathology exceeds mere depression; Hamlet has claim to a status beyond the commonplace. (10-11)

The example of using Hamlet not only illustrates the gender differences in the perception of a person afflicted with melancholia, but also shows that the brilliant melancholic is a remarkable character, one that is rare enough to be mentioned by name and not listed as a general category of intellectual and artistic males. Freud could have just as easily accomplished the task of demeaning women's melancholia while celebrating male melancholia by using a group of creative men in place of Hamlet. In using the specific example of Hamlet the category of the gifted melancholic is raised to a more elitist status than it had been as no longer just any intellectual will suffice to fulfill the picture of the melancholic.

The combination of Freud's gendering and rarifying of the romanticized melancholic has led to a cultural shift in the views of who is afflicted by melancholia as well as the perception of what it means to be melancholic. On the prevalence of the disorder prior to Freud it was believed that men, were affected more frequently by melancholia than women. Today the diagnosis of depression is far more common in women.

The elements of Freud's essay in combination made it both easier for women to be perceived as having depression, and harder for men to be perceived as having melancholia. This shift is quite evident in modern psychiatry where women are diagnosed with depression far more frequently than men. Schiesari wrote, "[T]he great melancholic of yesteryear would have been a tortured but creative male genius, but the stereotypically depressed person of today is an unhappy, unproductive woman." (16) This shift does not indicate that an underlying disease process shifted from affecting more men in earlier times and more women now, but rather that it is culturally more accepted that women are affected in greater numbers than men. The cultural acceptance in turn affects the number of women who are willing to be forthcoming about their affliction and seek diagnosis and treatment, adding to the statistical evidence supporting this gender bias.

The change in melancholia resulting from Freud's theory of loss provides evidence that the categories of mental disorders are in deed social constructs. The publishing of an essay does not have the power to alter the prevalence of a biological disease in people, say

men versus women, but it certainly has the power to shift cultural views and perceptions. Church wrote, "Ian hacking suggests that the crucial thing about a socially constructed category as opposed to a 'natural' category is that it is not inevitable, it can be changed. Change would be more or less difficult, though, depending on the sort of construction at issue. Insofar as it is the mere concept of a syndrome that has been constructed, that concept can probably be abandoned pretty much at will." (15) This type of change need not be abandonment of a disorder, but could be slight shift in the groups affected as a result of cultural values. Such has been the case with melancholia and depression.

Shifting in and amongst categories does not happen in groups of natural kinds. The categories that exist for mental disorders are useful to humanity in aiding the ability of psychiatrists to treat the symptoms of perceived disorders. However the categories that have been constructed do not give insight to the causal factors of mental disorders necessary to know if we are to believe that mental disorders are natural kinds. Instead, the ways in which the theories of causal factors that contribute to mental disorders affect the cultural views and acceptance of disorders, and thereby affect the prevalence of disorders in groups within the culture, is evidence of the social constructionism of mental disorders.

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Wilfred Colon

A Window Of Color
acrylic on canvas

One Race, One Tongue

Sometimes a father's sword is not
silver or bronze,
but silence.

Isaac's abba,
for instance, was prouder
of his carrier pigeons than of
his son.

Up on a roof, tending
the caged, Solomon could not tell
anyone the day his heart became
a museum,
                even himself.
But not a week would pass
that he did not curse
a wife's genes, or a son's course.

Across the same small
settlement, Mohammed's father trafficked
in camels.

Once, when one
refused to mate, even in response
to the nomad's horse-head violin, Ibrahim
called to him his son.
Looking to the east, he waved his long bronze sword
and in an instant a river
sprung,
            pooling blood and urine.

On that day, Ibrahim meant to teach
his son the expectations of his gender.

Instead, Mohammed learned
to run.

Cagen Luse

Night Train
acrylic on canvas

The Space Between

Chet Frederick Fiction Award Winner

It was five o'clock in the morning the first time I went home with you, and the sky was beginning to turn pale. On your porch, holding my spring jacket as you fumbled with a key, I felt certain that I had left Boston altogether, had returned to a cabin in Maine I visited once as a child.

Your house was huge and rickety, with peeling paint, and a spruce tree grew in the dirt yard. Ugly, comfortable furniture dotted the sprawling porch, and a homemade door of carefully fitted wood and chicken wire hung in the doorframe; in the front hall, seven or eight bicycles held each other upright against the twisting staircase. I asked for shot glasses and salt, and you led me to a windowed kitchen bathed in blue light, where you climbed up on the sink to produce the tiny, dusty glasses from above the cabinets.

In the bathroom upstairs I changed into a pair of your boxer shorts and an old, mint-green t-shirt. I mixed the salt with warm water and carefully drowned my contact lenses in the shot glasses, brushed my teeth with the cleanest looking toothbrush from the little rack and spat as quietly as I could into the grubby sink. In the mirror, my skin was pale and clean, my eyeliner barely smudged, my brown hair limp. I peed clear, scentless piss into the toilet, and rinsed myself with cool water before I flushed.

Leaning against the smooth wood posts of your loft, you slid two fingers under the waistband of the boxers and held them there, still. I made love, instead, to your collarbone, its winglike ridge delicate and enduring under my warm mouth.

We slept soundly. The next evening, I stood smoking in the alley behind the restaurant, watching the sun setting on the tin kitchen roof as my tables filled inside. Under french fry grease and pastrami oil I detected your smell, pungent groin and hair, still lingering in my armpit, and wondered why my eyes stung suddenly with tears.

***

Six months later we are in the new, queen sized bed in my apartment, and sharp October light is making halos on the gauzy drapes and white sheets and polished hardwood floors. I am only half awake when you are suddenly nudging me, stroking my hair, and I look up, groggy. You're wearing a smile I've never seen before, illuminating the small laugh lines around your blue eyes. "Hey!" You jostle me a little. "I love you!" As if this is breaking news, as if you're telling me the president has resigned. I reach up and put my hand on your shoulder and squeeze. "Say that again."

Six months after that it is April again and we are on a beach in North Carolina, drinking Heineken. The sand is cold, damp and packed hard from the wind and rain of yesterday, but the sky is clear and I am assigning numeric values to the spaces between stars, calculating the area of a triangle, a rectangle, a trapezoid. I draw my breath in deep, wanting to say everything; hold and wait; exhale, needing nothing.

***

By July your room has become our room, and the smell of our sweat has seeped into every corner, reeking so much of home that I am loath to install an air conditioner. I have painted the walls a bright yellow, grunting and sanding and taking care with them, swearing at whatever sixth grade art class put them up and left them there to rot. We lined them with twelve eight-foot shelves, sagging ominously under the weight of our thousand books.

The first night after the room was finished, we lay on my big mattress on the floor, kept awake by the novelty of it all, nervous that we would wake under an avalanche of F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Steinbeck and heavy Home Depot planks.

"You should move those Camille Paglia tomes off the top shelf," you whispered. "They'd knock you out from this distance. Like a penny thrown off the Empire State Building." I pinched your thigh, hard. "Aii! Mademoiselle, tu es villaine! Merde!"

"Merde, toi même." I whispered back, gleeful. I took the warm, smooth flesh of your freckled shoulder in my mouth and bit, gently that time, the salt of you coating my tongue. "Mais je t'aime, Monsieur. The books look good up there, don't they?"

"They do," you answered, softly, and you reached over and took both my hands in one of yours. Later, long after you were sleeping with your eyelashes curled on your cheek, I stayed awake and watched the heavy shadows shift on your naked back.

I remembered my last boyfriend, years before you. Sometimes at night I would look at him and wonder who he was beyond his title. *That is the postman- his job is to deliver the mail. That is the grocer who sells me oranges. That is my boyfriend who holds my hand in public and sleeps in my bed and wears a moustache that makes me feel ambivalent about the rest of his face.*

Not so with you. I feel that I am absorbing the knowledge of you through my fingers resting on your hipbone, communing in sleep as we do in the waking hours.

The walls hold and so do we. In your room that becomes our room we learn each other by heart. We study a language that does not exist in books and every day of that hot wet summer we grow ever more fluent, until I wonder that we still use words at all.

***

In December we are in our second winter and I'm living inside my head. One night, after reading a copy of Eliot's *Preludes* seven times over on the train, I come up our glassy, iced-over street and climb the salted wooden steps gingerly and stop on the porch, where I light a cigarette and tuck my ungloved hands into my coat sleeves as I smoke. The armchair I spent most of last summer occupying is completely filled with snow, but I sit down anyway, ignoring the cold that has numbed my toes in my boots. I stare out at the streetlight for a long time as if I expect to find something there; twenty minutes later I slump up the staircase to our room, lie down on the floor we used to fuck on back in the loft days, and sob.

When you come in, sweaty from the bike ride home from work, pulling at your turtleneck, I am there still. You crouch down next to me and place your big, square palm on my back, asking *What's wrong?* but I can't answer. "Babe," you whisper again, "can you tell me what happened?"

The only answer I could give would be "*the notion of some infinitely gentle/ Infinitely suffering thing*" which you will not understand, because it is really no answer at all. I hear the concern in your ques-

tions turn to irritation, and I know I am being unfair, and still there is nothing I can say. Some things, I can't transmit with a touch or a smile.

It's times like this that I wonder about my capacity for love. How can two human beings ever really know each other, how can anyone know me when the Preludes have laid me out on the floor and I can't say why? The analyst I saw in high school would say, depression, and make a note. But a depression is an indentation, an empty spot that used to be full. I am not empty so much as bursting.

***

After you read *In the Penal Colony* you went out and got two tattoos on your forearms. Big block letters- one arm reads DOUBT, the other NOSTALGIA. "They're my sins," you explained the night we met, "tattooed on my body." We were standing in Jeff's kitchen, drinking mojitos, while the party conducted itself raucously in the yard. You grinned, sideways and rueful- "I try not to give the Kafka explanation too often. It seems a little pretentious now."

At two o'clock that afternoon, I had come down the Davis Square train station escalator in my new spring jacket, a tailored Jackie O affair with big red buttons. My hair was pulled back in an especially perfect chignon, and I was thinking that nineteen was the best age anyone could possibly be, looking at men and watching them look at me and wondering about everyone, and then I saw you at the bottom of the escalator.

You were standing in front of the bench, wearing 501s and a white t-shirt and Caterpillar boots, playing Waltzing Matilda. Your voice was curious, a little choppy, only mostly on key; there was no microphone, but I could have made out the words all the way down the platform. And people were listening to you, really listening, not talking or looking down the tunnel for the train.

Before I was even down the escalator I knew, somehow, that you were important. I couldn't decide if you were handsome; your nose was a little bulbous, and your dark hair curled wildly into cowlicks over your ears. But there was some quality about you that I absolutely couldn't put my finger on, that me afraid to do anything common, like leave a note in your guitar case or wink or give you my number. So I looked right in your blue eyes and sang every word

to Waltzing Matilda, a full octave higher than you, but quiet. The train came before the last verse and I got on it. I thought about you all afternoon, and then I went to Jeff's party that night, walked into the kitchen, and found you crushing up mint and sugar.

"Hey- you're the girl who knows all the words to Waltzing Matilda."

"I know," I said, smiling, feeling like someone had opened a cage in my chest and let out Ella Fitzgerald. I felt like singing every song I knew. I picked up one of the drinks from the batch you'd made, the glass sweating a little in my hand. "Why doubt and nostalgia?"

***

We built a bridge over doubt, made of lumber from the loft and planks from the porch and time, and crossed over into knowing. Knowing suffuses the air and sits in my breast, sweet and unmoving. But nostalgia is the space between us, always beyond my reach, as if I didn't have my own. It's strange to remember that we see the world through different eyes.

***

Late that night in bed, after I have re-shelved the *Preludes,* I wrap my arms around you to feel your heart beat and I pray to God to protect our fierce, majestic, tiny human love.

Inches in Seconds

The horses burst from the gates and they thundered fiercely to the inevitable conclusion, Poas by a nose, the horse Jeffrey hadn't picked. Another loss at the end of a losing day and, he had to believe, a losing life.

Think like a winner and you are a winner. He felt the bold clap on his back and heard the words even though the woman who repeated them for over forty years was dead. His mother lived by such pithy statements, a true believer. But Jeffrey felt as though someone else controlled his life in every way and no amount of repetition - *make hay while the sun shines - you lay in a bed of your own making - pull yourself up by your bootstraps* - would make it otherwise.

Of course, his mother could afford plenty of self-reliance and optimism because she wasn't a gambler. His addiction persisted, despite his admission of it years ago. He knew his lot and its pitfalls but regarded them hazily, as if through glasses of the wrong prescription. In fact, he stumbled slightly, walking toward his old Chevy Impala in the bright late afternoon sun. He recovered unharmed, but imagined what he presented in middle age, like an old drunk, short and skinny, with his rumpled oxford shirt, worn khakis and scuffed loafers. He shaved on a random schedule that inevitably left him with an unkempt beard spattered with the same gray that matched his complexion, his skin pasted over his bones as if by an incompetent hand. He never was good looking and time only prolonged his misfortune. *Face your faults and eat your spinach; both'll make you stronger.* Another of his mother's decrees that seemed so auspicious, but in the end proved deficient.

He trudged up three flights to his apartment, enduring the stench of garlic and body odor that pervaded the building. The door next to his popped open and his neighbor dropped to retrieve her newspaper from the mat. He sensed her without looking, as two thoughts in quick succession registered in and then escaped his mind. Firstly, he came home at different times dictated by his cash flow and employment status, but that neighbor always appeared just when he

arrived. Secondly, for how long had that blue-flowered rectangle, on which her paper rested, been left in a low-income building where the decor was neglect, and boredom drove miscreant youths to frequent vandalism, and where nobody else had a doormat in front of their door.

He lived there for eleven years and couldn't be sure if he just started to notice, or if his neighbor and her mat had always been there. He fit his key into the lock, grunted aloud at the enigma, and then dismissed it. His neighbor straightened, and probably mistaking his grunt for a greeting, offered a cheerful hello that he didn't acknowledge. They performed this ritual daily, reminding him of an expression he never understood. *Constancy is the hobgoblin of small minds.* He didn't know what "constancy" was, and had long ago decided that this was one his mother got wrong in some way, not just for him, but also for everyone else.

He crossed the threshold and closed the door. His old tabby rushed to welcome him. The cat, a male that Jeffrey used to call Brutus, became so old and scrawny that Jeffrey renamed him Old Tabby and then referred to him as OT.

"How ya doin', OT?" he asked, bending to pet the cat rubbing against his ankles.

"Meow," the cat replied, momentarily interrupting his purr.

After only a few seconds of OT's affections, the acrid odors and seedy residence, the unemployment, poverty and compulsive gambling disappeared. Transported to the moon, faraway and weightless, he drifted into the fragrance and vista of the studio, wafting aromas of turpentine and creamy oils and acrylics, foregrounds and backgrounds of pots, palettes and easels, all worn and mottled with paints he used. His canvasses filled the room. Although the images before him, bore no resemblance to flora of any kind, soaking it all in seemed like being in a lush botanical garden, an endless, vivid landscape of soft, redolent petals and leaves. *Remember to stop and smell the roses.* He breathed deeply and widened his eyes.

"Oh, yes," he said, lifting a long handled brush. He smeared the velvety amber onto his skin. He ceased to wonder how he still felt this joy renewed every day for so many years. Sometimes, he imagined that this was how the racehorses felt when they were sent from their gates and released to their furious quest.

The day teased him along it, with eight straight winning tickets. Jeffrey left the track with his pockets full of cash, not bothered by how empty those same pockets would be in twenty-four hours. Maybe tonight, instead of his canvasses, he deserved a special treat, a nice fish dinner. A bit lighter, today, in his skinny frame, he headed home, propelled up the rancid-smelling staircase, he slipped his key into the lock and grunted, silently repeating a mantra: salmon and peas…salmon and peas.

Then, inexplicably, he did something he had never done before.

Still gripping the key jutting from the lock, Jeffrey heard the bright hello a few feet away and he turned his head toward the sound, saw a woman with a newspaper standing on a blue-flowered mat, and he nodded his head. In a split second before Jeffrey could turn his key, open his door, cross his threshold, feed OT, go back out and indulge in a tasty dinner the woman abandoned her mat and closed their distance in feet to inches.

She stuck out her hand. "I'm Sadie Winchell," she said, while Jeffrey stood there staring at her.

She was shorter than he, and thin, but with bumps in all the right places. In her late twenties, Jeffrey guessed, with shoulder length wavy raven hair, smooth pale skin and clear blue eyes. Ears and eyebrows were pierced, on a quick count, in at least twelve places with tiny silver rings.

She said, "I'm apartment sitting here for a year while my brother teaches English in Milan."

Jeffrey thought he spotted another flash of metal in her mouth when she opened it.

Evidently undeterred by his stare, his silence or his frozen stance, she rushed on. "He was kind of nervous about going away with terrorism and all, but, you know, sometimes you just have to take your chances and make hay while the sun shines. Of course, he hasn't had any problems or anything so it's been good for him and good for me too. One hand washes the other, you know? Listen, I know we just met and all, but haven't we been neighbors? I mean, would you like to come over for dinner sometime?"

"Huh," he said.

She repeated the question. "Would you like to come over for dinner some time?"

"I heard you," Jeffrey said.

"So what'd you ask me for?"

"What?"

"What'd you ask me to repeat myself for?" She stopped and waited for an answer in a way that Jeffrey interpreted like a patient asking a doctor about a diagnosis.

"Oh. I guess I wanted you to repeat yourself," he said. "Or, maybe, I was trying to figure out if you really said what I thought you said." Abruptly, he stopped.

She giggled. "Yeah, I said it. I've been told by many, I'm too pushy."

She had completely misunderstood him and he had no idea what made her say she was pushy. He stared at her youth and at her jeans, hearing his mother's words spoken by this stranger - she had given her name, but he couldn't remember it - and he realized that his hand had fallen from the door, from OT, from his salmon dinner. He reached into his pocket and felt the thick wad of bills there.

She smiled and the rings in her brow caught a sparkle of light from somewhere in the murky hallway.

"Is that seven?" he asked, peering closely.

She lifted a painted finger to her brow. "Seven," she said. She pointed to her left ear. "Seven." Then she briefly stuck out her tongue. "One."

Jeffrey asked, "What's your name?"

Without hesitation, she said her name, though they both knew she'd told him only seconds before.

He hadn't offered his name, but that didn't occur to him until she said, "It's nice to meet you Jeffrey, after just saying hello all this time. I've been dying to meet you, actually."

Abruptly, not that he would have protested anyway - he was already transported - she grabbed his hand. The beginnings of something familiar from some other place and time stirred him. Her hand was soft and cool and she led him into her brother's apartment. "I wasn't sure it was you," she said, "when I first saw your name on the mailbox." He floated with her through her brother's rooms. An idea breezed by, a warm smell, a sweet taste. "But then I saw you," she said, "with your rumpled clothes and intense looks."

She delivered him gently to one of his paintings. She looked at

it, not him. After they were both silent for awhile, she said, "You always smell like..." She leaned in, a slow elegant movement, and took in a deep breath of him. "...Like turpentine and glue."

Then he placed it.

She said, "I knew you were the painter."

Jeffrey smiled. "I have a taste for salmon steak tonight," he said, sent from the gates in a powerful fury of hooves and dirt.

Dustin Lee

SKTTT TFFF SHHHH
acrylic on canvas

The King and His Taster

Once, somewhere, lived a King who reigned over a vasty domain. His court held jesters, poets, astrologers, dancing girls, trick horsemen, fools, knaves, knights (errant and otherwise), his lords and ladies and all the typical sycophants. His castle, cold and dense and slate grey on the outside, was not much more inviting inside. An unpleasant but expensive building, everyone agreed.

The King had a taster, whose job was simple. He ate the first bite of the King's food and had no other duties. For his trouble he was provided a small apartment and salary. The job was not unsought-after, and while it brought no power the current officeholder comported himself in such a manner that he answered only to the King. His appointment was gained some time ago by one of the lords in exchange for the taster's father's silence regarding a rather sordid affair. Those who understood his story addressed him with a quirky kind of esteem that he accepted with the utmost gravity.

The taster saw the station as due appreciation of his own su-perior taste and perspicacity. When performing his duties he'd pronounce each royal morsel "Splendid!", or "Sapid!", and was always seeking some piquant offering to charm the King with. He fancied himself an orator who deserved an appointment to a diplomatic post.

The King, uninterested in superlatives, only wanted to know if the food was poisoned or not. Though he was clad in purple silk and a sable stoll, and bore a diamond-studded scepter crowned with ruby, these fineries failed to protect him from the entreaties and threats that assailed him from all sides. He was helpless to stabilize wheat prices. His peasants hated to work. Barbarians forever threatened the peace. He had most trouble, however, with his own appetite for opulence. He was spectacular, in a world that couldn't allow for it. The unhappy King faced the approaching anniversary of his coronation with more disenchantment than jubilation.

The feast, though, was to be dreamt of. On the broad table would certainly be roast duck, boar, beef, buck, with all manner of exotics and delicacies besides. The feast would last for hours and include

hundreds.

"Pox, they'll be begging again in a week", the King brooded in his study while reviewing the particulars of the affair. And the lists were particular: procurements of eel, pickled ears, eyes of sow. Across his desk was sketchwork for the crude gutters that would be installed behind the revelers' benches.

On Coronation Day, the bustle of the feast's preparation inspired the little taster. He would declare his morsel "Sovereign!" Pregnant with his great notion, he buzzed about atwitter all the day. He polished the buckles on his shoes and winked at his silvery twin.

After the last speeches waned into the dusk, his moment arrived. When fed from the King's own plate, he delved into his premeditated verdict. Which was never completed. The meal was heavily poisoned, and he fell.

The King sulked. "Have the carcass removed," he told an aide, "drop it in the potter's field. Hang all cooks and have a new meal prepared." As he watched the peasants gorge he felt weary of giving orders but that he couldn't, by circumstance, not.

A new taster was hired the next day, his appointment also procured by a lord in exchange for his father's silence regarding yet another, rather sordid affair.

The son of one of the hanged chefs grew to be a peasant rebel who rose to some fame in his own right.

Motto: *The self-serving often over-stuff.*

Roland Merullo: Afternoon With An Author

Donald E. Cookson Non-Fiction Award Winner

Although educated at posh prep schools (Phillips Exeter and Brown University), Roland Merullo has never forgotten his working class roots. This background has served him well by providing an abundance of resource material, a notable work ethic and, perhaps most important of all, a sincere appreciation of the sacrifices he, his wife Amanda and his parents have made to allow him to arrive at his current station in life.

During the past sixteen years, Merullo has published nine books. His latest, a novel entitled *Breakfast with Buddha*, was released last fall. A reviewer in the Chicago Tribune wrote, "Merullo has a knack for rendering emotional complexities, paradoxes, or impasses in a mere turn of the phrase." The New York Times called his novel, *A Little Love Story*, "thoughtful, restrained (yet very sexy)" and stated that, "Merullo captures what it feels like when you meet 'the one'- and what you're willing to do to hold onto that person."

I interviewed Mr. Merullo over omelets during a late breakfast one afternoon in Sylvester's, a Northampton, Massachusetts restaurant. My purpose in interviewing him was to satisfy a graduate course requirement; the focus was to be primarily on elements of a writer's craft itself. But Mr. Merullo was generous with his time and advice, spending nearly three hours with me discussing all aspects of the writing process as well as detailing some of his personal experiences and challenges.

-PHS

Writing as a Profession

SARNO: When do you think you first started to take your writing seriously?

MERULLO: I had just returned from the Peace Corps. I thought it was a failed experience. Amanda and I were living in this dingy

little apartment in Allston. There was no kitchen table - in fact there was no kitchen (laughs). So I wrote in the Allston Public Library. It was a dismal time. I wasn't quite broken, but I was bent…it was probably the low point in my life. Somehow, I knew what I wanted to do. So I sat there and started to write. You know, contrary to popular belief, libraries aren't quiet (laughs). The Allston Public Library was no exception, but it taught me how to write with noise all around me. Now, I can write in most places, with one of my daughters playing a computer game next to me - 'Find the letter Q'. So in hindsight, the Allston library was a good training ground.

I started out writing poems, essays, plays - anything. For a long time I was writing memoir…I was writing whenever I could write. I had this guy, Michael Miller, who was like a mentor - a gift from the universe. I was doing carpentry. I had a little job at his house; he lived nearby. I didn't talk to anybody about my goals, about my writing. I told Amanda, but I didn't like to tell anyone that I was a writer. For some reason, I started to talk to him. We had a lot in common; we were brought up in a similar fashion, with the same kind of rules and regulations of how to act. So we talked about that, had conversations and had gone from that to a mutual love of books. So one day he asked, "What are you doing now?" For some reason, I said, "Writing." He said, "You know, I'm a writer" - and Michael has had poems published in some very prestigious magazines, and so he said, "Why don't we get together sometime. You can show me what you've written."

So from about 1983 to 1989 we'd meet once a week. Go out. Have a beer, a pizza and we'd discuss my writing. It was great for me because he was smart, well read and was not too kind - not overly kind anyway (laughs). He would 'X' out whole pages and write "bullshit" at the top and on another page he'd circle some paragraph and say, "You've got a great gift." He was very encouraging overall, but he wouldn't hold back on the criticisms.

One night, we went out to the Williams Inn and we had a couple of beers and he said, "You should write a novel about Revere where you grew up." He would also recommend books to read, movies to see, that kind of stuff. And I said, "Michael, I can't even get an essay published in a carpentry magazine and now I'm going to write a novel?" But he said a great thing: "Some people are sprinters and

some people are long distance runners." He was right; I'm a long distance runner. To this day, I've only published two short stories - both in golf magazines. One of them is my favorite thing I ever wrote, but it's a golf story. And it just doesn't seem to come as easy to me as longer fiction does.

I wish everybody could have someone like Michael.

Agents

SARNO: How did you find an agent?

MERULLO: Michael suggested a bunch of agents he knew of and I contacted them. They all said no. Then I had a friend who had published a book and he recommended his agent, so I used his name. She liked the first half but didn't like the second half. But she wrote me a nice letter and said if you'd be willing to rework the second half, here are my thoughts on it, then I'll take you on as a client. So I said OK. I was in Russia at the time, so I spent five or six months reworking it and returned it to her.

Unfortunately, she was very slow. Sending it to publishers one at a time, waiting for rejections, then sending it out again. Months went by. Then, she called me up one Friday and said I got a response from Houghton Mifflin. "The editor has read half the book. He really likes it. He's going to read the rest over the weekend and he'll call us back on Monday."

I had been writing that book for five or six years, had been writing in general for ten or eleven years and I didn't really have anything to show for it. So as you can imagine, I didn't sleep much that weekend. My agent called me on Monday and said that the guy from Houghton Mifflin didn't like the second half, but he wanted to talk to me. She said that was very unusual because in her experience, most editors really want to keep a buffer between them and the author. Otherwise, they have people walking into their office waving five hundred pages saying, you know, "Can you look at my book?"

She said I know you're disappointed, but I think you should give him a call. Well, I was crushed. But I called the guy up and we had a very good, an incredible conversation. And he said, "Look, you don't have to listen to what I say, someone else may buy the book the way it is. But in the second half, you're backing away from the intensity, you've put this new character in and everything is now happening to him. Markin, your main character, is one removed from this pal of his, which means he's now two removed from the reader."

"I think you're afraid of that material," he said.

Immediately I knew he was right. He was absolutely right; he recognized my anguish. He wanted to steer my focus back towards the main character, but I was afraid to confront that stuff. That was me going back to Revere and facing all the things, the demons - what I liked and didn't like about my hometown - and I was afraid of that. I couldn't go there. The guy hit the nail right on the head.

SARNO: It's ironic because this material that you were afraid of became the source, the seeds, for at least two other novels and parts of your memoir.

MERULLO: But he helped me to get over my fear.

SARNO: It's interesting you say that because in a memoir seminar at the University of Massachusetts, Askold Melnyczuk asked us to do some sense exercises, but he also asked the writers to list three things that they didn't want to write about. And I have to tell you, towards the end, at least half of those students ended up writing about those topics that they thought they would shy away from.

MERULLO: That's a great exercise. Psychologically, I didn't want to go there. It was too painful, too difficult. So I took that book, took six months and rewrote it. In the end, one of my favorite moments was writing the Angie character. I remember where I was when I wrote it. I was sitting at the living room table in my little house in Pownal, Vermont. And when I wrote that thing, I was thinking: this is great; this is how I want it to be. I don't think I changed more

than five words of that Angie section from the day I wrote it.

Agents: Part Two

MERULLO: Well, I was grateful for what my agent did in finding a home for Leaving Losapas. But when I finished rewriting it, she sent me down to Houghton Mifflin alone to meet with the editors - knowing they were going to make an offer. I was a neophyte. So I'm in the office with the head of Houghton Mifflin and the person who was going to be the editor. They tell me how much they're going to pay for it and I say thank you very much. It was a ridiculously low offer and there was nobody there to advise me.

Houghton Mifflin did do a nice job with the book and so it worked out fine. But then I switched to a different agent and I had her for thirteen years.

Routines

SARNO: In a fiction workshop, Askold used the term firewall. He was stressing the point that people have to develop one in order to protect themselves from the intrusions of their outside life, that is, if they hope to accomplish anything with their writing. What methods do you use? How do you get things done?

MERULLO: It used to be more regular before we had children. I'd get up, have breakfast with my wife and she'd go off to work. I'd do some meditation in the morning and then sometimes Michael would call. I'd get down to writing about 9:30 and then take a very short lunch - fifteen minutes or so, walk around, maybe do something else physical - (I took some karate lessons), before returning and writing until mid to late afternoon. Maybe I'd do some carpentry work on the addition of the house before Amanda would come home for supper and later I'd work for another hour or two.

When I initially started, before anything was published, I would do carpentry all day, come home, eat dinner and then write. That first book was mostly written in the corner of my basement in Vermont, at night, an hour and hour and a half at a time. It probably took four or five years to complete it. But now that we have children

- it's a totally different schedule, and it can sometimes be 'catch as catch can'. So today for example, I'll work an hour or two this afternoon and hour or so tonight and then the weekends I do stuff with the kids mostly. Yesterday was more typical I guess. I had breakfast with the kids; took them to school. Meditated for a half hour, forty-five minutes. And then worked from mid morning until 2:30 - 3:00 o'clock, with a very fast lunch in between. I try to do something with the kids when they get home from school or sometimes go upstairs for an hour or so and continue writing while Amanda may be cooking supper. At night sometimes I'll go for another hour, hour and half. It depends what else is going on. I like working at night if I can and try to tackle my emails then.

Dedication

MERULLO: If you really want to write you will. Almost all writers deal with the challenge of balancing their work with their writing at one point or another. I'm not convinced that it's really luck if you don't have to deal with that struggle. Because if you publish your first book at twenty five and don't have to work, that may be a very nice thing, but it's also not such a good thing for some people. They miss out on a lot and they are presented with many temptations to simply fuck off.

There are different kinds of self-disciplines that you have to possess, have to cultivate when working all day, when trying to find a way to write either before or after work - or on weekends. There are a variety of demons that you face that can come between you and your goals. Whatever those goals may be: being published, just finishing something or making money from it.

Some of these demons are pretty subtle. Some of them are friends or a spouse or family members who may be threatened in some ways by your desire to do something that you haven't been doing. Or threatened by the fact that you want to devote a lot of free time to writing, that there may be times that you don't want to talk to your husband or your wife. I haven't had to deal with that particular one - Amanda has been very understanding with the possible exception of very early on when she had to get adjusted to the fact that I needed a lot of alone time.

I think whether the obstacle is not enough time to do the work, or not enough energy to do the work and write, or family considerations, or kids or a spouse, I think the way around that is just to set a modest, less ambitious goal for that day. Sometimes, when I'm really tired, I'll sit down and I won't say I have to write for two hours or two pages. It's 9 o'clock at night; you're tired, just write a half of page, then you can go to bed, watch TV or whatever, and feel that you did what you had to do. Inevitably, if you start that, just sit down and do that, at least for me, I'll get a page or a page and a half, maybe two pages.

You have to manage; it's like being a general. You have all these different parts of the army, elements: physical energy, creative energy, time management. You have to figure out what you can be comfortable with. I know what I can live with. Some nights, I'm just going to lie down on the bed and edit - even that editing process can provide a sense of accomplishment.

If for five times a week you write two pages, that's five hundred pages a year. That's a good output. But I think what happens sometimes is that people say that they can never write a five hundred-page manuscript and they convince themselves of that. Or maybe put together two twenty five-page short stories. But if you take it in little bites like that, it's not daunting, that daunting aspect is what paralyzes people. I've taught students from eighteen-year-olds to eighty-year-olds and have heard that a lot.

If it really means a lot, if it's a really powerful feeling, a desire, then you have to make sacred time for that. And I don't use that word lightly. You have to carve out of your lifetime that is not touched so that you can devote to it. You would do that for your children. If you were a religious person, you would do that for prayer. If you were an athlete, you would do that to work out. You have to do that. There's no getting what you want to get unless you take that step.

There are a lot of different ways you can do that. There's no rule about how much time you have to spend. Or you have to write every day. Or how many pages you have to write or how many words. Everyone does it differently. You have to carve out that time - can't let anything get in the way of that time. It can be midnight to 1:00 AM; it can be 4:00 AM to 5:00 AM. It can be lunch.

For a lot of people, you have to give something up in order to do

that. For a young college kid, you might not go to every party that you've been invited to. If you're a family person, you might have to get up early. If you've got a job - when I was doing carpentry, I would make notes on pieces of 2 x 6 lumber. I'd eat lunch real fast, scribble down some ideas or write a sentence or something on wood, whatever was the medium at hand. And if you don't do that, if you can't do that, then I think the odds of success - however you define that success, those odds become miniscule. Because too many other people really want it.

Some Tools A Writer Needs

SARNO: Can you think of some other things that may help someone to become a good writer?

MERULLO: As important as it is to master the craft aspect of things, which it is -- I would never undervalue that, what is undervalued though is the emotional armor and traits necessary to write successfully. Those can include dealing with rejection, dealing with self-doubt. These can be some of the demons we spoke about previously. Having the ability to discern between the supportive and the toxic - people who, for whatever reason, don't want you to succeed. It doesn't mean you have to divorce those people or stop being friends with them, but you can keep your writing apart from them.

The ability to write a good sentence is not a rare ability. The ability to tell a story is not a rare one - a lot of people can tell a story. But the other thing, the thing that separates the large amount of people who can do that from the smaller number of people who get published, is the capacity to conquer the psychological aspects I discussed. It's not so common a trait to be able to deal with public rejection - or even humiliation. You know, critics can be rough. Rough in print, sometimes even personal. Some people can't deal with that. Some people can't deal with the self-doubt aspect of it. Dealing with those demons are rarer talents and strengths; they need to be cultivated.

I can't imagine how a writer can succeed without some basic empathy for all his characters, for mankind in general. I had a student

in Bennington. It was an essay class and Dorothy Allison has a collection of essays - I think it was called Flesh. I'm not sure of the title of it, but I had them read the prologue. It's gripping, horrifying - written about where she grew up in South Carolina. Boys being raped. Girls being raped. Very poor conditions. Brutal. People going to prison at a young age. Ubiquitous violence.

I assigned this essay to be read prior to the class. So I always start out the class by saying, "Let's just go around the room and let's say a couple of things about your initial response." No one says anything for a minute and then this student raises his hand and says, "Whine. Whine. Whine."

Oh my word. And I remember my comment back to him was. "Jason (not his real name), is suffering real to you?" I mean, that's all I could think to say.

Here's this person and nothing seemed to touch him. I don't know...elementary compassion was missing there somehow. Now in hindsight, I think it probably did upset him and this might be generally true, that it upset him so much he didn't know what to do with those feelings. It's like when you're at awake...I can remember when my father died. Hundreds, probably a couple of thousand people approached us. But there were a few people who came up to us and said something unbelievably stupid. But, you know, they're just uncomfortable; they don't know what to say. It can be one of those times, when truth is stranger than fiction.

Seeds of A Story

SARNO: How do you begin a story? Do you use a yellow writing pad? A word processing program?

MERULLO: Revere in Those Days and most of the memoir were written completely on the computer. Everything else was written in longhand first. I think I'm actually more self censoring when I write in long hand, because I go slower, I can actually check to see what the next word will be, so I tend to make a couple of cuts as I proceed - telling myself that "I don't want to go there." I can type faster than I write; I can also get things done quicker. But I like, I think I prefer, the physical nature of writing by hand on a yellow

pad with a fountain pen that Amanda bought for me.

I don't outline; I try to outline, wish I could. But outlining doesn't work for me. It kills something. I end up trying to hew too close to the outline, instead of letting my imagination go where it wants to go. It deadens me; I just can't do it. I've tried to get in the middle of a novel and then say OK, the next three chapters are going to be, or should go this way or that, but it never worked, or at least it hasn't worked for me so far.

I guess with most of my books I just start with a scene in mind. For Revere Beach Boulevard, I had a very powerful vision - not in the sense of a religious vision, but a very visual, very real moment. I saw Vito sitting in the backyard, overwhelming presence, waiting for the full moon to come up. Then you say, what would make that moment interesting? Why would that not be an ordinary moment watching the moon come up? Then I had his wife next to him, then I had his wife sitting, but now it's the last few days of her life.

I didn't know she was there; it was only Vito at first. And then when I started writing, that question that's always in the back of my mind appeared, "Well, where is the juice?" Why is this interesting? Why is this not an ordinary moment? Then, I thought, OK his wife could be there, OK, his wife is dying. Perhaps there's some old simmering tension between them. Then the phone rang, then it's his son, well maybe it's his illegitimate son calling to tell him that his other son is in jail.

Later, he visits the police station. I didn't know that the person Vito met at the police station was his illegitimate son at the time, that there was something between them that was unusual. I just knew that there was a bond, but I didn't know what it was at the time; I had no idea.

I think when I go inside myself and try to imagine somebody, a character, it comes out in pictures. It's just the way it is. Thanks to my parents, I have a great education, but the intellectual side is not as important to me. I don't care about it; I don't foster it. I don't read as much as I probably should - I certainly don't write that way. When I write, it's from some kind of thing buried deep inside me that I love - it's the only word for it. And I don't love that intellectual stuff.

Roland Merullo is the author of:

Leaving Losapas
A Russian Requiem
Revere Beach Boulevard
In Revere, In Those Days
Passion for Golf: In Pursuit of the Innermost Game
Revere Beach Elegy: A Memoir of Home and Beyond
Golfing with God
A Little Love Story
Breakfast with Buddha

During the past sixteen years, Merullo has published nine books. His tenth, a novel entitled *American Savior*, a humorous and provocative politico-religious spoof, will be released this August.

Fifteen, Fishing

Martha Collins Poetry Award Winner

that first time
you took him,
reeling---

half expecting

a girl to emerge
from some shell
on the bottom,

waiting

for your hook
to fail,

waiting for your line
to break,

with gulls, like voyeurs,
circling
the Evinrude

and you, far from harbor
and farther still from the boy it moored, sailing

with your rod cocked
over the prow---
reeling, reeling

Deep in the linings of your sea jacket,
these are the dreams the fish recall.

Jasmine Jiang

Self -Portrait
colored pencil

sonnet to mySelf

I have lounged long in bitter arms of fear,
And now I barely know this sad captive.
How soft, bars of iron compared to these,
Which hold with grasping tendrils of small thoughts
Gasping breaths of joy, in their stranglehold.

Adrift on this sea of madness, I look
For a buoy of hope on the horizon,
A Saint, a Savior, a Bodhisattva,
"Somebody help, surely I am dying"
In rebellion I embraced this ocean,
In fear I call out to starlit heavens,
"Where is my mythical hero who saves?"

And before I drown, I hear sanguine words,
"You are your Hero, you are your Hero..."

Zachariah Hayes

Captivity
photogram

Truro (from a museum)

In the gallery,
in angles painted in light
your frame stood lovely in its corner:
engrossed, solitary.

From mine,
I gazed upon the canvas
where Hopper painted the Truro hills
rolling across their spaces.

The etchings in a sign:
The Hoppers summered in a
small house among the empty
dunes of South Truro.
How nice, I thought,
to be an artist
or use summer as a verb.

In Truro mosquitoes summer
in pools of rain-water &
cicadas chime in wooded hills.

On the canvas nestled between hills &
sunlight, Hopper shows a cottage
real enough to have been the one
where we made love
beneath white bed linens and the hush
of the salty Atlantic.

Truro, on its canvas,
has not changed.
These images and spaces,
though not eternal,

persist.
And from summer to summer
our images will press against
sterile angles of light,
in columns of falling dust.

This is how the sea will have her way
and even in eighteen-fifty
Thoreau saw her, hungry,
eating Truro's Highland Cliffs—
forty feet a year.
And we'll stand here watching
the sands turned in the sea.

Moonstruck

Thunder boomed like a sonic bang.
We ran in opposite directions.
We ran toward each other.
We laughed, a couple of lunatics,
as rushing raindrops of irresponsibility
fell on our heads.
Neil Armstrong was walking on the moon,
but in Quincy, Mass., we didn't care.
The whole world was on another planet.
You could hear the silence that tasted like awe,
but life on earth was more important.
We had been catching monarchs
in the field next door,
feeling fluttering wings
inside our hands.
We flew by day and floated at night,
and all we could think of was
Never trust anyone over thirty
because we were young and thought young thoughts.
Then the rain danced on the sidewalk
and disappeared.
Salt of low tide lingered in the air.
This all will be forgotten,
but we'll know where we are,
and every night after that
the moon will look a little different.

Edson Bueno

Leap of Faith
black and white film photography

Time Flies

Time is a fly at the window.
Measuring her seconds in heartbeats
rapid as her translucent wings,
she counts each day a year.

She twitches upon the peeling sill
as dust falls in languid,
eternal summer afternoons.
In the restless indigo shelter
of night's season,
she does not sleep, but
flips & flirts with
the buzz of the sixty-watt sun
that glues the heavy-eyed poet to his desk.

Time's an illusion, he pencils—
& would believe, save for
time flies swarming,
tediously flitting & clicking
into the electric break of dawn
as he searches for words to fill

the night's silences.

About Our Awards and Award Winners

Chet Frederick Fiction Award

The Chet Frederick Fiction Award honors the best work of fiction published in each issue. Former UMB English professor K.C. "Chet" Frederick is both a poet and novelist. Mr. Frederick has recieved numerous awards, including a 1993 fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. He has contributed short stories to publications such as Epoch, Shenandoah, Kansas Quarterly, Ascent, and Ohio Review.

Mr. Frederick was gracious enough to act as judge for this issue. This semester, the Chet Frederick Fiction Award goes to Ms. Rosie Healy for her story "The Space Between," starting on page 72. Mr. Frederick maintains, "she [Ms. Healy] writes with great sophistication & assurance." Rosie Healy is an English major and French minor in her third year at UMB. She has toured nationally reading her work and coordinated the Boston Zine Fair from 2003-2004. In 2007, she was Editor-in-Chief of the Watermark. Currently, she prefers writing songs to fiction and is working on a set of recordings with her band, the Wellumscopes.

Donald E. Cookson Non-Fiction Award

The Donald E. Cookson Award honors the best work of non-fiction published in each issue. The award was named for a man with an abiding love of all types of non-fiction. Mr. Cookson has been a sportswriter in both Massachusetts and Maine. Among other things, Mr. Cookson has been a cartoonist, an educator, an insurance executive, a marketing guru, and a selectman. This award has been endowed by colleagues, friends, and family, including Mr. Cookson's son who attended UMB, to honor a life dedicated to education and excellence in non-fiction communication.

Mr. Michael Hogan acted as guest judge. Michael Hogan is an English major at UMB set to graduate in May 2008. Having arrived at UMB with a concentration in creative writing, he has made the transition to journalism and is currently the Editor-in-Chief of The Mass Media, UMB's independent student newspaper.

This semester, the Donald E. Cookson Non-Fiction Award goes to Mr. Peter Sarno for his piece, "Roland Merullo: Afternoon With An Author," starting on page 85. Peter Hallet Sarno recently completed a graduate internship at UMB and will be teaching the Art of Fiction as an adjunct instructor in the fall. Sarno is preparing a collection of author interviews and hopes to have them published on a weekly basis in a newspaper or in book format. He also has been submitting short stories from his master's degree final project to various publications.

Martha Collins Poetry Award

The Martha Collins Poetry Award honors the best work of poetry in each issue. Ms. Collins established the creative writing program at UMB and currently holds the Pauline Delaney Chair in Creative Writing at Oberlin College. Her honors include fellowships from the National Endowment of the Arts, the National Edowment for the Humanities, as well as three Pushcart prizes. Collins is the author of a book-length poem, Blue Font, as well as four other books of poetry. She has also published a chapbook, co-translated two collections of Vietnamese poems, and edited a volume of essays on Louise Bogan.

This semester's poetry editors, Gregory Stenta and Jeffrey Taylor acted as guest judges. This semster, the Martha Collins Poetry Award goes to Mr. Paul Morse for his poem, "Fifteen, Fishing," on page 96. Paul Morse teaches writing at two Boston area colleges, and is a Master's candidate in English, concentrating in Creative Writing.

Richard Yarde Art Award

The Richard Yarde Art Award honors the best work of visual art published in each issue. Richard Yarde has been a presence in the New England art world sine the mid-1960s. Mr. Yarde has trained generations of young artists at a succession of colleges and universities, and has been an art professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst since 1990. Solo and group exhibitions throughout the country have featured his paintings, which reside permanently in public collections that include the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Instituation; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Ms. Jacquie Gouveia acted as guest judge. Although Jacquie's formal education was in business, art has always been a big part of her life. She spent years painting on her own and creating smaller plein-air landscapes. This process and self-discipline gave her the best education on light and color. Working with both oils and acrylics, she currently creates abstract paintings inspired by nature and music. Most paint is applied with palette knives or squeezed out of the tube and drawn directly onto the canvas. She often builds up layers and sands paint off with a steel wool pad. Her work has been featured at numerous shows throughout New England.

This semester the Richard Yarde Art Award goes to Christine Newshman for her acyrlic on canvas painting, "A Trendy Winter," on page 11. Ms. Gouveia maintains, "there is a quiet and subdued intensity about the painting." Christine is an Art History major at UMB, and she is currently focusing on the Dutch Masters. She will be concluding her studies next spring. Christine grew up with her mother on Cape Cod and spent her summers with her father in Manhattan. Her split existence between the pastoral and metropolitan still manifests in her paintings, wherein there is a visual interest in both rural landscapes and urban architecture. She is experienced in watercolors, charcoal, and sculpture, but presently her preferred method is acrylics.

Illuvment
Matt Mazzola